



Lenses of Humanity:

Leading Constructive Dialogues on Race, Equity, and Justice

Kyle Reyes, Ph.D. | CCS Constitutional Literacy Institute | June 29, 2023

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My More Interesting Context

- He/him/his pronouns
- Mother (Annette Kehaulani Maeda) is Hawaiian-Japanese
- Father (Norberto “Buddy” Antonio Reyes) is Filipino
- Partner (Michele Lee Ludlam) is Navajo/Diné
- Grew up in Canoga Park, California (San Fernando Valley)
- LA sports fan (Lakers, Dodgers, Raiders)
- Speak Spanish – Lived in the northern coast of Colombia
- Graffiti and comic artist
- Failed three semesters of college
- Danced with four different cultural dance groups for 10 years (performed dances from 17 countries)
- Seven Children – Kekoa (18), Ikaika (16), Sepa (15), Ka’imi (13), Akoni (11), Keawe (8), Anuheia (6)
- Nerd of many things / Collection of comic books and toys

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As a teacher, how do I lead meaningful conversations about really sensitive and difficult topics?

What can I do to create an environment where students get better at engaging with the uncomfortable?

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So, why a framework of humanity?

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Humans long for three primary things:

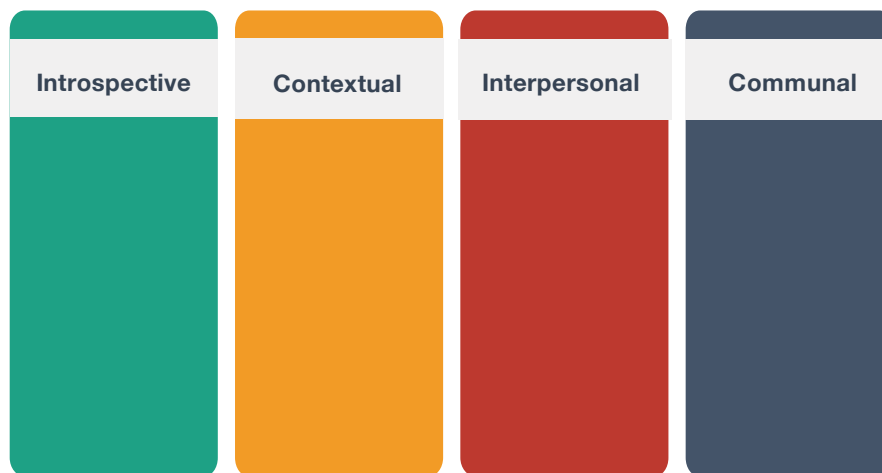
Safety & Stability	Connections & Belonging	Purpose & Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Basic needs (food, water, air, sleep, shelter) • Peace • Comfort • Freedom • Autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Validation • Community • Intimacy • Friendship • Trust • Love • Understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement • Recognition • Respect • Value • Growth • Development • Relevance

Our **humanity** is found in our ability to facilitate the pursuit of these goals with others.

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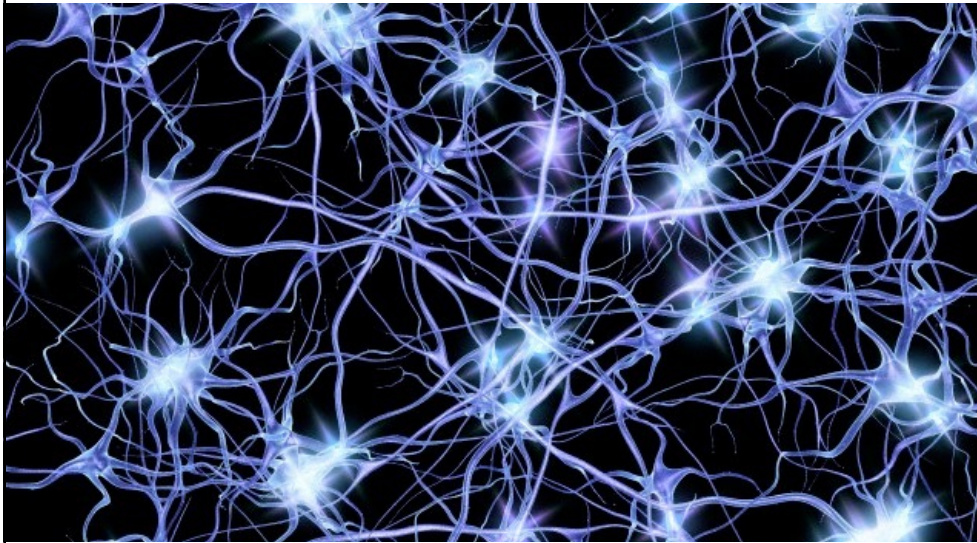
Part I: The Introspective Lens

Humanity-Driven People Engage in Ongoing Self-Analysis, Reflection, and Lens Checking

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Newborn Coding



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Codes

- *Belonging*
- *Safety*
- *Love*
- *Intellect*
- *Talents*
- *Identity*
- *Connection*



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Who is the Librarian of Your Mind?



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Our **Experiences**
Impact our **Lenses**

And Our **Learning** Comes
from **Reflection** on our
Experiences

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We don't see
things as **they**
are.
We see
things as **we**
are.

Anais Nin, 1961

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Exercise: Mapping Characteristics Why Do We **View the World** the Way We Do?

Ascribed	Roles & Hats	Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were you born in to? • First language • Geographic location • Family structure • Birth order • Family religion / worldview • Family political leanings • Socioeconomic status • Working parent(s)/guardian(s) • Gender • Ability/Disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What roles do you play? • What hats do you wear? • What responsibilities do you have? • What titles do you carry? • Who depends on you? <p style="text-align: center;">So What?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What significant experiences have you had that influence who you are today? • Positive or negative • Person, place, incident • Life changing/turning events • Experiences that affected your state of living, state of mind, emotions, motivation, and trajectory

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Left Handers, Filipino Elvis, and Onion Cutting

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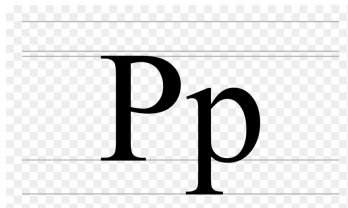


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Privilege

You benefit from not having to spend emotional, psychological, or physical energy thinking about how you will have to navigate society with your identity(ies).



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So What?

- ▶ Recognize the *Lenses* you see through have been developed through your life experiences, environments, and influences.
- ▶ Become a more proactive *Librarian of Your Mind* and check your lenses.
- ▶ You are all in influential positions...new lens development increases our capacity to have meaningful impact.
- ▶ The more we are aware of and understand *how and why* we view the world the way we do, the more we understand and can be *deliberate* about how we are *showing up for the world*.
- ▶ Recognize your *privileges* and use them to open doors for those who don't have them.

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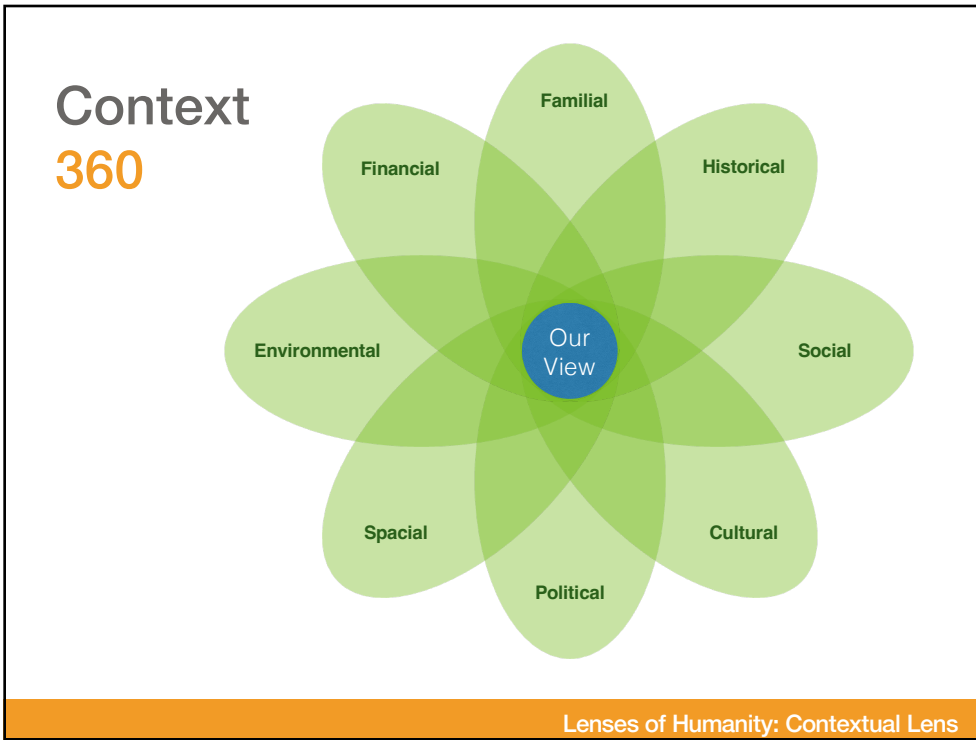
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Part II: The Contextual Lens

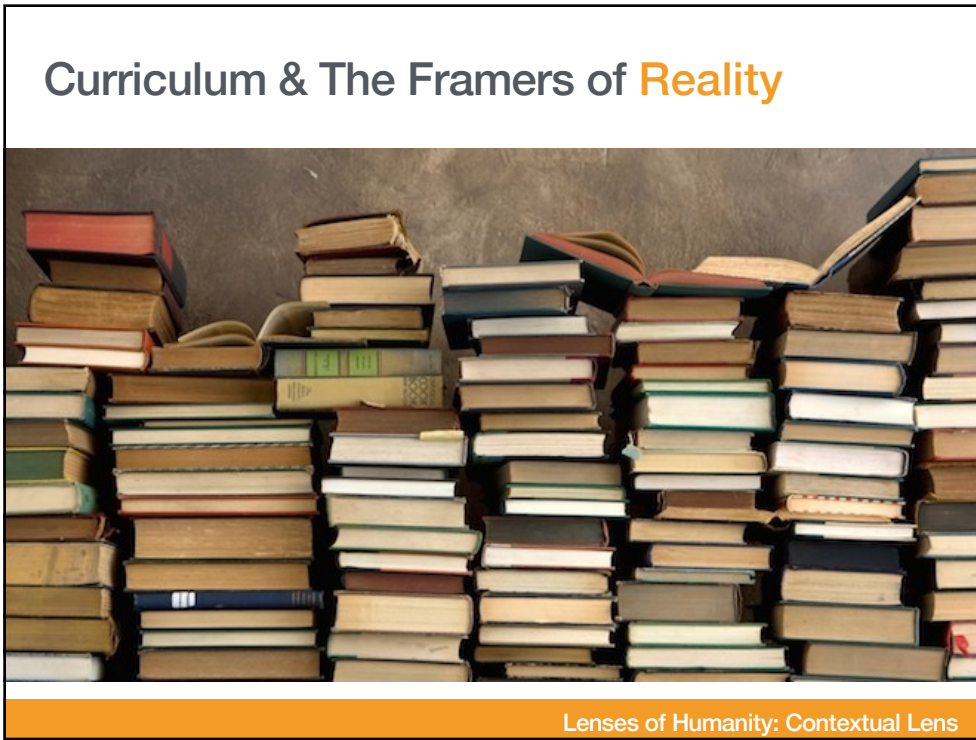
Humanity-Driven People Study and Engage with Diversity of History, Thought, and Perspective

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Why the Need for a **Contextual** Lens?

We have to **learn**
and **unlearn** stories

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Danger of a **Single Story**

So that is how you create a single story: show people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again and that is what they become.

The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make on story become the only story.

Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.

- Chimamanda Adichie

TED



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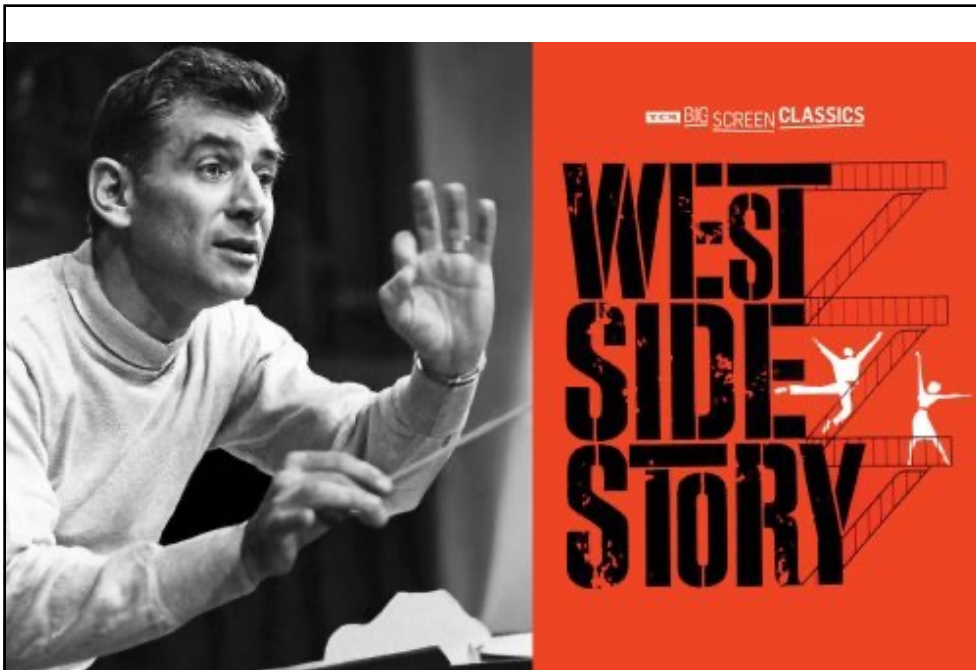
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Combatting the **Single Story**



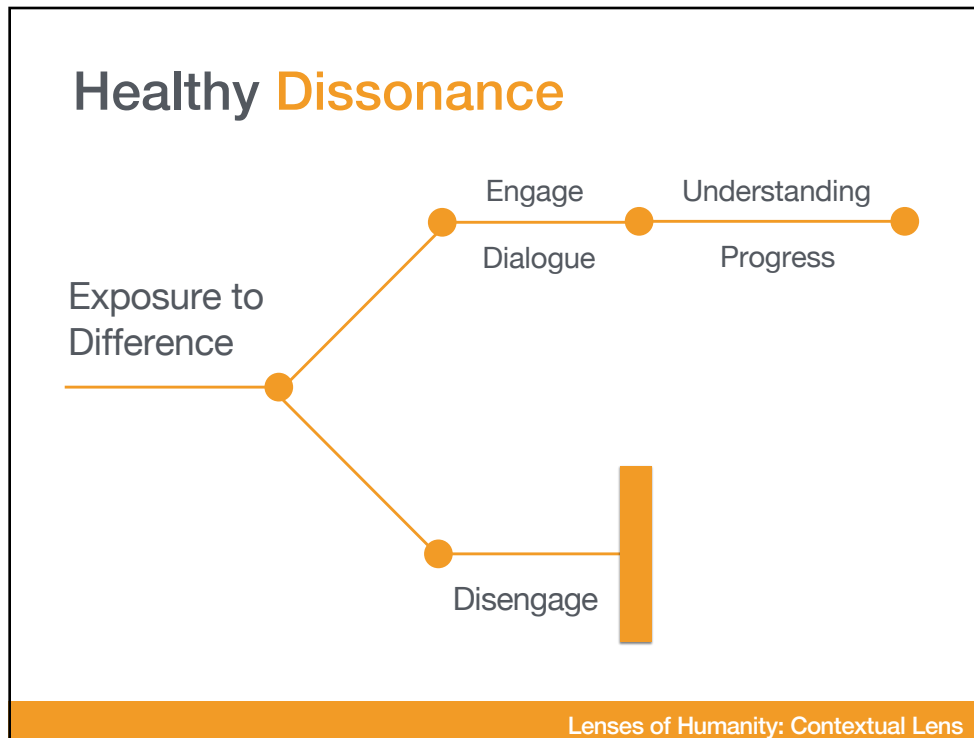
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Education

Formal & Informal



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Engagement

Echo Chambers & Enemies



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Immersion

Becoming The Other



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So What?

- ▶ We have to *Learn and Unlearn Stories* about people and the world around us.
- ▶ In the absence of exposure to diversity of thought, context, perspective, and history, we believe the *Single Story* about others.
- ▶ We need to lean into *Healthy Dissonance* as an opportunity for growth.
- ▶ *Story Sharing* humanizes our lived experiences and provides cultural context.
- ▶ We need to *Do Our Own Work* through education, engagement, and immersion.

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Part III: The Interpersonal Lens

Humanity-Driven People Learn From and Improve Empathy for Diverse Individuals

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Humanizing Communication

Goal – To facilitate greater understanding between two or more humans. The goal is not consensus but rather understanding. Remember – people want to be seen, heard, and understood.

- Active Empathy
- Genuine Inquiry
- Humanizing Words

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Active Empathy

Active empathizers **set aside time, resources, and energy to learn** the challenges someone else might be facing. Empathy is developed the more we engage with people in meaningful conversations. Empathy is not a weakness. Rather, it is a **courageous act of humanity**.

Active empathy requires **cultural humility** — or the recognition that your awareness and understanding of the experiences and perspectives of others is limited. And, you genuinely believe you can learn from them.

Ask Yourself – When have I seen/demonstrated active empathy or cultural humility?

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Genuine Inquiry

Asking sincere and open-ended questions with the **intent to truly learn and understand**. Genuine Inquiry stems from cultural humility and reveals our attitudes and dispositions towards learning.

An important component of Genuine Inquiry is a **clarifying question**—especially in the face of a charged or inciting comment. Clarifying questions can (1) elicit more context to improve understanding, and (2) de-escalate the initial tension of the comment. Note – the reactions to our questions and inquiries depend on the relationship, the tone, and the context.

Ask Yourself – When have I seen/demonstrated genuine inquiry?

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Humanizing Words

Words matter! And words are tied to how people identify (personal pronouns, race/ethnicity/nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity & expression, and names). It can be difficult to keep up with personal preferences of how people want to be identified. But that shouldn't stop us from **trying and learning**.

Validation means that when someone says they experience the world in a certain way, **we believe them**. **We humanize individuals by advocating for them** when others may have diminished them or belittled them.

Ask Yourself – When have I seen/demonstrated humanizing words/communication?

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So What?

- ▶ *Courageous empathizers* set aside time, resources, and energy to learn the challenges someone else might be facing.
- ▶ *Cultural Humility* is our recognition of our limitations and a belief that we can actually learn from the experiences of others.
- ▶ *Genuine Inquiry* leads to increased context and understanding.
- ▶ *Words Matter* – The power of naming one's own identities, experiences, and perspectives is important in building humanity.

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Part IV: The Communal Lens

Humanity-Driven People Connect With and Lift Groups and Communities

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Three Canoes: Our Quest for Community



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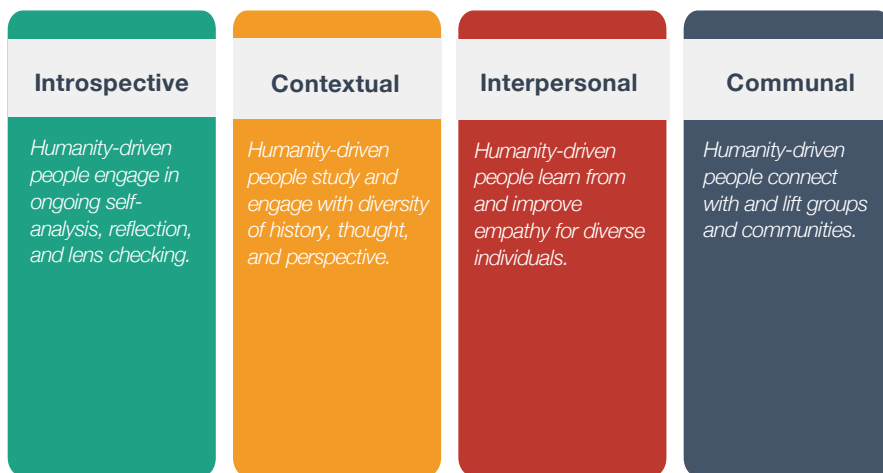
So What?

- Building community is *multidirectional* (past, present, and future)
- Be *deliberate about mentorship and sponsorship* and seek to be a *positive entry* in the life book of your students.
- Focus on *communityship* and opportunities to have people lift together (spirit of bayanihan).
- Show up with *solutions*, not just critiques.
- Demonstrate your own *creative appreciation* for those who have come before. Through study of new histories, we can more fully appreciate the humanity it took for us to carry on our work.

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So What?

I hope teachers will deliberately build into their lesson plans:

- Discussions on classroom agreements—“How will we talk about difficult topics this year?”
- Exercises that reveal worldviews as results of their lived experiences and it frames our moral codes or our sense of right and wrong
- An invitation to lean into healthy dissonance
- Assignments that provide exposure to, education about, engagement with, and immersion in new cultural contexts
- Modeling how we can engage in humanizing communication—especially when we disagree

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Mahalo

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